AN INTRODUCTION TO PSYCHIATRY. By Max Valentine, M.D., D.P.H. (Pagination by chapters and sections. 15s.) Edinburgh and London: E. & S. Livingstone, 1955.

THE author's intention was to publish a book which would bridge the gap between psychiatry and the rest of medicine at the theoretical level. He is to be congratulated on having done so in an original way, and the result is concise and interesting. He has surveyed the whole field of psychiatry in the light of experience and the most recent knowledge, and shows the wisdom which we associate with the Scottish schools.

After a historical introduction, present-day ideas are given of mind and body, emotions and ætiology. Development and child psychiatry follow, and various conditions are described as psychiatric syndromes, psychoses of unknown origin, or disorders of histogenic and chemogenic origin. Excellent sections on treatment and the technique and use of electro-encephalography include a consideration of psychopathy and epilepsy. Many case-histories are presented, and the bibliography and suggestions for further reading at the close of each section should be of much value to the practitioner and the student. A few pages are devoted to clinical psychology, mental deficiency, and forensic psychiatry. Unfortunately, no mention is made of the latter, as it is applicable to Northern Ireland.

The grouping into sections is a model of clarity, though some may regret that page-numbering has been replaced by decimal subdivision.

The appendix is made up of interviews and interpretations of dreams by various doctors, and these are preceded by the diagnosis and a précis of each case. They are practical illustrations of much that is contained in this informative manual which can be recommended with confidence to all who are interested in psychiatry. D. M. G.

POLYPEPTIDES WHICH STIMULATE PLAIN MUSCLE. Edited by J. H. Gaddum. (Pp. 140; figs. 33. 15s.) Edinburgh and London: E. & S. Livingstone, 1955.

THIS book is based on papers given by fifteen distinguished and active research workers at a symposium organized by Professor U. S. von Euler at Montreal in September, 1953; the papers then delivered have been revised and brought up to date. It is an account of the growing edge of an advancing frontier of knowledge. It is therefore exciting, but somewhat confusing to those not familiar with the country just behind the frontier. Even the explorers are sometimes uncertain whether they are discerning separate peaks, or merely the same peak from different angles.

The substances dealt with all occur naturally. The neurohypophysical hormones, oxytocin and vasopressin, are octapeptides for which it is now possible to write structural formulæ; their physiological rôles are partly understood. Cholecystokinin, which is possibly identical with substance P, is another polypeptide extractable from tissues, and probably of physiological importance. The other polypeptides dealt with are formed by the action of enzymes on the α_2-globulin fraction of the plasma proteins. This group includes hypertensin and angiotonin (which are probably identical), and kallidin, bradykinin and substance U (which may or may not be identical). Hypertensin may well have a physiological rôle, but of the other substances it can only be said that the ease with which they are formed from plasma, their presence in secretions and tissue extracts, and the very great potency they display suggest that they have a function, though this has not yet been defined.

Other active substances considered are darmstoff, an organic acid present in the wall of the gut, which stimulates intestinal motility, the hepatic vasodepressor, VDM, which has been identified as the iron containing protein, ferritin, and the renal vasoexcitor, VEM, which is a protein of unknown composition.

This book is of value not only as an authoritative summary of the current position in this interesting but complex field of research, but for the light it throws on the ingenious but essentially simple methods which are being used to unravel the many tangles. In devising these, Professor Gaddum has played a notable part. A. D. M. G.